

Witness

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[0 : 0 0] Last Christmas, Sal and the boys and I had the chance to take a bit of a break. So straight after Christmas, we went down to Melbourne and had Christmas with my brother's family.

And then on the way back to Sydney, decided we would break up the trip by going through the snowy mountains and spending a few days there. And there was no snow, it's the wrong time of year, but it was still some beautiful scenery.

Bessie, which is my van, if you're wondering, did really well, making it through the Alpine roads and seeing all the trees and hills and all that sort of stuff. And while we were there, we decided that it would be a good idea with a two-year-old and a five-year-old, or two and four-year-old, I should say, to do the walk up to the top of Mount Kosciuszko.

So the walk began pretty well. We survived the chairlift without Hudson jumping off. And once we got to the top, it was a nice day. The weather was clear. I had one of those fancy backpacks that you kind of slot your small child into.

It was still going to be a fair job carrying Hudson, but I had a backpack at least to restrain him. We had water in our bag, we had sunscreen, and we were ready to go. So off we charge up this track, and the first sign we get to says, 10 kilometres round trip to the summit.

[1 : 1 6] So we were thinking, look, it's a bit ambitious, but the second half should all be downhill. So it should be okay. And so off we set.

About 150 metres later, Bailey asked if he could be carried as well. Bailey's my oldest son, if you're not sure. So I attempted to carry Hudson on my back and Bailey in my arms for the next half a kilometre, at which point incline, altitude, lack of fitness, call it what you will, everything conspired against me, and I had to concede that this was not going to work for 10 kilometres on the Alpine Ranges.

So we conceded that we weren't going to make it to the summit. We readjusted our goal, we looked at the signs and saw that there was a lookout that you could go to where you could look up at the summit.

But it was a four kilometre round trip and we figured we're already halfway through getting there, so that's probably a good goal. Now, problem was, Bailey had already decided he was finished. He'd checked out on this whole exercising, hiking thing, was not interested at all.

And so for the remainder of the trip, I had to negotiate with him every step of the way and bribe him and somehow convince him and motivate him to keep walking. So, we'd stop.

[2 : 3 7] I'd point to some landmark that was just a bit further up the track. I'd tell him that that's where we're going. Once we got to there, he could have some food, some chocolate, something out of the bag that would get him excited.

And then, sure enough, we'd get this short burst of time where he would focus and he'd resolutely march off up the track, sometimes even running. But then that would be followed by tears, tantrum, giving up, sitting in the middle of the path, followed by focus him on a new goal, bribe him with some more food, get some more enthusiasm and off we go and repeated cycle.

It was an exhausting trip for him and for us, physically from carrying them, emotionally from trying to convince him, because there was this ongoing struggle for him and I'm going to be honest, for me as well in the background, not that I admit it at the time.

There was this struggle between being motivated to get to this goal and just the unpleasantness of the task that we were having to deal with in order to get there.

And the same is true of what it's like to be on the journey following Jesus. This series called The Journey Home has been placing us on this road of following Jesus, helping us to recognise that if you're someone who calls yourself a Christian, there is still journeying for you to do.

[4 : 00] You haven't arrived yet, you're not finished, but there is a goal, there is a home that's worth pressing on for. There is something that is sufficient to motivate us to keep going.

So the Christian journey stands between two immovable points. This is something we've talked about in this series. Last weekend at Easter, we looked back at the beginning where we see how God loves us and the forgiveness that he offers to us as Jesus dies in our place on the cross. And looking back at that first point throws our eyes forward to the end point, the future that God is preparing for his people. That perfect home that he's designed that's going to be free from suffering and sin and sickness and hurt and pain and death.

It's a certain future hope that's based on a concrete historical reality. So if you hold to one without the other, it's easy to get knocked around in the circumstances of right now.

If we want to be able to stand firm, if we want to be able to persevere, if we want to be able to continue, in spite of the hopelessness of failing time and time again, in spite of the struggle of suffering that we see in the world around us, we need to anchor ourselves on both of those points.

[5 : 22] Both points are essential. Because just like Bailey when we were walking up that hike, the temptation is always to be distracted by the here and now.

It's always to be consumed by the details of today's challenge or this week's challenge or this year's challenge. But God gifts us on this journey.

God gives us perspective givers, tools if you like, that help us remember those two points and experience the grace of God in the details of here and now as well.

See, it's really important that we understand that these two points are God points. So it's not just the cross and then heaven, but here you see God working to draw you into a relationship with him.

You see God expressing his love, God showing his forgiveness. And then over here, it's not just heaven, but it's God's presence. It's God preparing a perfect place where we'll get to enjoy him forever.

[6 : 29] It's God in both cases. And what he's doing on this journey is giving us gifts and tools that help us to encounter him now as well.

So we get a dramatic encounter with God when we discover what he's done in the cross. Heaven will be the most dramatic encounter with God you can possibly imagine for all of eternity. But what God wants to do is give you opportunities to encounter him and enjoy him now as you walk the road towards home.

He's giving you tools that will draw the reality of who he is. The reality of what he's already done. The reality of what he's preparing. And drag it into your situation today.

This week. Drag it into your here and now. And that's what we've been looking at this series. That's what this Journey Home series has been about. The tools that God gives us to drag the reality of who he is into your here and now.

So quick recap. We want to be people who confess our sins so that every step of the journey we're reminded that God loves us no matter what we've done.

[7 : 40] We're reminded that what Jesus did on the cross is enough for God to keep forgiving us and keep loving us. And we're more excited for the future because we're beginning to get a growing picture of just how incredible and how sufficient God's love is.

Second gift he gives us is his word where he speaks to us and he draws our eyes back to the cross and forwards to heaven and up to him so that we get this big picture of him that shines brighter and more substantially than the challenges that we face.

Third gift he gives us is prayer where we get to draw close to him and experience him as our heavenly father all the time. Every day.

Every moment. Regularly. Fifth thing. Nick showed us a couple of weeks ago that we get to gather as God's people so that we get a front row seat to see God working in one another.

We get to look at people who it just doesn't make sense that anyone would love them and recognize that God sent his son for them. And as we do we get a bigger picture of God ourselves.

[8 : 51] We get a bigger understanding of what it is that he loves us. All of these gifts draw our eyes, our minds, our hearts up to the God who sits over all of it.

To the God who begun the journey for us by sending his son. To the God who is preparing a home for us. It's all about what he is doing. And today we're going to finish this series with one final parting gift for your journey of following Jesus.

These are Jesus' final words to his disciples that Nick just read out for us in Matthew 28 and Acts 1. Jesus is about to go to heaven. He's kind of passing on the baton to his disciples.

And he gifts them with one last tool for the journey. You know it's important because it's the last thing that he says. He wants to leave this thing ringing in their ears.

Plus he says it with absolute authority. Did you notice that in Matthew 28? He prefaces this with, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

[9 : 57] Because of what he did on the cross, we said it in the Creed just a moment ago in Philippians. Because he died and rose again, God exalted him and gave him absolute, infinite authority over everything.

And from that place, what's the message he's got for his disciples and for us? Make disciples. Or as Acts 1 puts it, be my witnesses.

This is one of the main reasons we're left on this journey. One of the main reasons there is even a journey at all. This is why God doesn't just kind of start us on the journey with the cross and then fast track us to heaven.

This is why people don't disappear when they become Christians. God leaves us here in the messiness of life to be his witnesses.

To make other disciples. Now a quick sidestep before we move in. I'm not going to unpack this too much. But we've got to ask the question, One, what is a disciple? And two, how do you make one? It seems important.

[11 : 00] He mentions it. It's his final words. Simply, a disciple is a follower of Jesus. A disciple is somebody who has started the journey. Somebody who has discovered that God loves them because he sent his son to die in their place, even though they don't deserve it.

And who has said, I want in and I'm going to follow God. That's when a disciple is created, when they discover who God is through what he did in his son on the cross. And so you make disciples by introducing them to God in Jesus.

You make disciples by pointing them to what God has already done. And then by helping them do the journey using the gifts that we've been talking about this series. Helping them discover that God speaks in his word.

Helping them discover that God invites them to speak to him in prayer. Helping them discover the blessing of gathering with other Christians. The gift of confessing sin. And now, the final gift of sharing that faith.

Of being a witness to what God has done for them. Now, at this point, this final gift sounds less like a gift than maybe the other four have. Sounds a bit more like work.

[12 : 10] Like a job. Like a hassle, even. Make disciples to the ends of the earth. Christians like to talk about this using a scary word, evangelism.

It's a word that just means telling others the good news about Jesus. But there are few words that scare Christians more than evangelism. If I said, hey, we're going to go. And we're going to go and do evangelism over in the shop straight after church.

Suddenly, everybody's kind of busy tonight. You've got plans. Important things, but plans. And you're not going to be able to make it. Now, it's not that we don't know that we should do evangelism.

It's not that we don't think it's good. But man, it's scary. It's intimidating. I mean, what if I say the wrong thing? Or what if they reject me and hate me for trying to talk to them about Jesus?

What if I destroy a friendship? Or worse, what if they ask me a question that I don't have an answer to? See, practically, making disciples isn't complicated.

[13 : 17] It's simple. But it's still hard. It's simple because all that's required to make disciples, all that's required to be a witness to Jesus, is to act like Jesus and to speak about Jesus.

That's it. It's not complex. Just act like him. Serve like him. Join a ministry team and rock up here with a ridiculous smile at a ridiculous hour on a Sunday morning to clean the toilet so that other people will be blessed.

That's serving like Jesus because it doesn't make sense to somebody who doesn't know Jesus.

Care for the poor like he would. Give your money away to them and to charities in a way that would make no sense to somebody who doesn't know Jesus.

Forgive like Jesus. Love your enemy. Do things that make the people around you confused about why you would do that.

I don't know if you guys have caught the story on the news over the last week or so, but just before Easter, a bomb, a suicide bomber, was detonated himself in an Egyptian Coptic church that was meeting.

[14 : 32] As he was about to enter, a security guard stopped him to send him through a metal detector, at which point he detonated his explosive and killed, I think it was 14 people, including the security guard.

I was watching a news interview this week of the security guard's wife. She was being interviewed by a Muslim news anchor, and as she was being interviewed, she basically said, I forgive the bomber.

And I want him to know that there is forgiveness, that God forgives people like that. And she just kept saying it. And at the end of the interview, the news anchor sits there in silence for what feels like minutes.

He just sits there not knowing what to do with that. And he responds with these words. He says, The copse of Egypt, the Christians of Egypt, are made of steel.

He says, If it were my father, I could never say this. These people have so much forgiveness, but this is their faith and religious conviction.

[15 : 46] Listen to this. He says, These people are made from a different substance. He doesn't understand why.

He doesn't understand how this could work. He hasn't met Jesus. He doesn't know the unconditional love that God offers to those who reject him and treat him like he doesn't matter. And so this kind of forgiveness doesn't make sense to him.

But when he sees it, it forces him to ask the question, How? Why? When we act like Jesus, the only answer to why that could be happening is Jesus.

When we put other people first, when we love our enemy, when we care for people at great cost to ourselves, it testifies to the one who has loved us unconditionally. Making disciples is simple.

Act like Jesus. And of course, tell people about Jesus. Open your mouth. Use some words. Tell people how good it is to be loved like this. Tell people how amazing it is to wake up this morning knowing that God loves you as much today as he did yesterday and the day before and tomorrow and every other day because it's not about what you've done or not done.

[17 : 01] It's about him. Tell them about the wonder of heaven that you're looking forward to. Tell them how amazing it is to know that you're going to heaven no matter what because Jesus has already guaranteed your ticket.

making disciples is simple. Making disciples is simple. Act like Jesus. Speak about Jesus.

But it's still difficult. Just want to throw in a small plug. Nick's already mentioned it. We're going to spend the next month in mission month wrestling with this whole concept.

How do we speak like Jesus and act like Jesus in our community? Here in Chatswood but also on your front line. At work. At school. With your neighbours.

With your family. With whoever it is that's in your life. How do we do that? We're going to wrestle with that in mission month. So make sure you're around for that. We're also going to spend some time this week in community groups actually giving you a tool to speak about Jesus.

[18 : 05] So get along to community group this week. But plug aside. Making disciples is simple but it still sounds like work. It still sounds hard to do.

The whole idea of going into the big bad world and trying to tell people about Jesus let alone live like him might cripple you with anxiety and fear. And I want to say that that's kind of fair enough. Making disciples isn't easy. It can be hard work. But it's still a gift from God to you. It's not accidentally in this series among four other gifts.

It's gift number five from God to you for the journey between what he has done in the cross and what he's preparing in heaven. He's not sending you out on your own.

He says in Matthew 28, I'll be with you to the very end of the age. Being a witness to God is a gift from him to you for your sake.

[19 : 15] And let me show you why. Firstly, joy shared is joy deepened. Now any of you who have spent a little bit of time with me will know that I have an annoying habit of quoting TV shows.

Some in particular more than others. TV shows, movies. It's not even intentional sometimes. I just watch a show and if I enjoy it and it's funny, the lines just stick in my head. And then later on we'll be having a conversation about something completely unrelated and just a word or a way that you say

something will trigger my memory and then blah.

Out comes the line from the movie or something. And you're looking at me like I'm a weirdo. I'm having the time of my life. I'm just enjoying the moment because the joy that I got when I was watching this show has suddenly been like regenerated and deposited into the right now.

You might think I'm weird and whatever and that's fine. Good for you. But the joy that I had has suddenly doubled because I got it when I watched it and now I get to enjoy it again because my mind's just playing the episode while we chat.

And it's just like getting to share it with you even if you don't get it increased my joy. Now if somebody in the circle knows what I'm talking about and starts to snicker because they're watching the episode in their mind as well, then my joy is off the charts.

[20 : 33] Because then I've like had this joy, dragged it to here, bounced it off that person and it's just like snowballing and the joy is getting bigger and bigger and bigger. It's like the original joy somehow gets grown, multiplied because I get to share it, because I get to relive it.

It's the same when it comes to witnessing for Jesus. See if I'm going to show to someone or explain to someone how good God is, the most compelling evidence I've got is how good he's been to me. It's the bit that I know better than anything else. It's the bit that I've witnessed, the bit that I've tasted and felt and experienced is God's goodness to me. His love for me, his patience with me, his forgiveness for me.

And so essentially the call to be a witness, the call to make disciples is a call or an invitation to revisit everything about God that made you think I want to follow him.

It's a call to come back to all the good bits, all the stuff that you experienced when you first started the journey. It's an opportunity to talk about how much God loves you and how he proved it when he sent his son to die in your place.

[21 : 58] That joy you felt when you first discovered that God wanted you in his family, that God was going to love you irreversibly and unconditionally, gets dragged out of that moment and then dropped into right now, because you're talking about it, because you're thinking about it, because you're sharing it with someone else and so you get to enjoy it all over again.

Joy is only fully enjoyed when it's shared. That's the point of how joy works.

Think about the way that we share the things that we enjoy in life, the way we talk about them.

Wasn't that meal delicious? It's an invitation.

It's saying, hey, how good is this? Let's acknowledge together how great this is. Or that restaurant was amazing. You should go there.

My joy was fantastic, but we know it would make it even better. My experience at that restaurant is you going there and coming back and going, you're right. It is the best restaurant. How have I not tried McDonald's before now? When you share your joy and see somebody else grab hold of it, it feeds your own joy.

[23 : 14] It grows your appreciation. C.S. Lewis describes it like this. He says, I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses, but completes the enjoyment.

It is its appointed consummation. What he's saying is you actually haven't gotten all the joy that you could until it overflowed, until it's been expressed, until you've shared it.

Which means that God has gifted you with the call to be a witness so that your joy will overflow. So that you will get the fullness of joy that is on offer in what he's done for you.

He has designed it in such a way that you're almost missing out on joy if you don't express it, if you don't share it. The call to be a witness of Jesus is a gift because it's an invitation to feed and grow the joy that you already have.

And secondly, it's a gift because it's an invitation to encounter God himself in fresh ways. When I was the pastor in my previous church, I was leading a group of high school guys in a D team, like a community group.

[24 : 33] I had five guys in the group and when we were there in year 11 and going into year 12, they had one friend who was part of their group at school. So it was six mates, five loved Jesus, wanted to be a part of it.

One definitely did not, but really liked these guys. And so they hung out, they were good mates. And we'd been praying for this one kid for months and months and months, but he was really clear that he wasn't interested in God.

Following God was not for him and was never going to be. And the boys would try and encourage him, they'd try and invite him, they'd talk about their own relationship with God. And it just felt like we were making no ground at all.

Until, finally, his girlfriend invited him to come on youth camp. And he said, yes, straight away. On the last night of camp, there was an opportunity to become a Christian, an opportunity to start the journey of following Jesus.

He was sitting right over in one corner with his girlfriend and her friends, and me and the other guys were literally over in the other corner, the opposite corner. And as we got to the point in the night where the preacher's standing at the front and inviting people to become a Christian, me and the boys are doing some of the most intense praying I've ever seen 16-year-old boys do.

[25 : 45] Like, it was physically visible how earnestly they were just pleading with God, saying, come on God, make tonight the night. Just willing this guy to get out of his seat and go forward.

Like, they were almost pushing him, just desperate for this guy to cross the line and start following Jesus. And as he finally took step one and two, the boys were jumping off their chairs, they're hugging each other, there was high fives.

We were so excited and celebrated. There wasn't a lot of sleeping that night on camp because they were all so, so pumped to see God kind of do something that seemed impossible.

But something occurred to me afterwards. As I was reflecting on this whole kind of scenario playing out, I began to recognise how that process had fed the five guys themselves.

As they'd been talking to this guy about God and been getting rejected time after time, they'd begun to see the way that God pursues people, even when they're saying no.

[26 : 53] They began to see the way that God doesn't give up on people, the way God is patient and continues to invite people who were busy telling him to get stuffed. And they suddenly understood how God had pursued them when they first came to follow him.

They suddenly had this bigger picture of what it was that God chose them as well because they saw it in action in their friend. As this guy began following Jesus, the boys got front row seats for God actively working in his life.

They began to see him wrestling with sin, being convicted, discovering that God was gracious to forgive him. They began to see him discover the peace and hope of heaven.

And as they sat there front row watching God work in front of them, it opened their eyes to what God was doing inside of them.

As they looked in front and saw the ways that God was encouraging this guy and strengthening this guy and blessing this guy, it suddenly opened their eyes to the fact that God had been doing all sorts of similar stuff in their own life, but they'd just never recognised that it was him.

[28 : 09] Suddenly the God that they knew was good was so much gooder. It was so much more real. They saw it concretely in front of them and it meant that they could reflect on themselves and be thankful to God in a whole new way.

In the process of trying to introduce God to someone else, these guys got to know God better. And that's kind of the whole point.

Every gift that we've talked about in this series has been designed to help us get to know God better. I don't mean just know about him, but know him.

Have a relationship with him. Because that's what you need on this journey. That's what you need in this life. You need a big, clear, vivid, compelling vision of Jesus.

One that's big enough and bright enough to still be the loudest thing when things in your life aren't the way you want them to be. And witnessing is a gift from God because it draws you back to encounter him again.

[29 : 15] To encounter his love for you as you see it worked out in the people around you. It drowns out the distractions of your circumstances. It drowns out the distraction of your own limitation and your own failure.

And it lifts your eyes to look again at what God has done in the cross. To look again at the future he's preparing for you. And to see that right now is part of the journey between those two points. Witnessing is a gift from God to deepen your joy in him.

A gift from God to reveal more of him to you. And a gift from God to help keep your eyes fixed on what matters most. What he's already done in the cross.

And what he's got in store for you in heaven. And yet, it's still hard to do. Even as we know it's a gift, it's still intimidating.

And so I want to finish by just trying to do concretely and practically. Think about how can we do it. What's one thing that could help us do witnessing?

[30 : 26] Well, I've got some really, really good news. You don't do it. You be it.

Did you catch that in Acts 1? It's not a job. It's an identity thing. So the instruction isn't from Jesus. You will do witnessing in Judea and Samaria and all the ends of the earth.

It's you will be my witnesses. They're even told to wait around for something to help them. Do you notice what it is? It's the Holy Spirit.

It's God's presence with them. It's the fulfilment of the promise in Matthew 28 that he'll be with them to the ends of the age. And the reason they need that is because being a witness is like being a mirror.

The way that a mirror works, I apologise for any scientists out there, this may be a somewhat primitive description. The way that a mirror works is that light comes in in the form of an image, some sort of arranged light particles that then reflect out the same image.

[31 : 41] If you don't have light coming in, you don't have light or an image going out. You need light coming in for there to be anything to see coming out the other way. And in the same way, a witness is somebody who witnesses something, who sees something, who hears something, who experiences something, and who then reflects that or bears witness to it by speaking about it, by reacting with the facial expression, by creating art about it.

It's testifying to something that they've seen and heard. But you need to have seen and heard something in order to be able to witness to it. So you have input before you have output.

In fact, the quality of the input directly affects the quality of the output. Good quality reflecting, good quality witnessing requires good quality input.

Good quality reflecting requires encounter with God that is sufficient to reflect. Now, I'm laboring this point. I'm aware of that. Because this matters. This is what shifts the call to be a witness from being a burden to being a gift.

This is what changes it from being something scary and intimidating to something that motivates us. To be a witness of Jesus, the key is you need to encounter him yourself.

[33 : 06] You need to experience who he is. What it is to be loved by him if you expect or want others to see it in you. You need the mirror that is your life to be positioned in such a way that you can see and taste and feel as much Jesus as you possibly can.

And that's why every gift on this journey that we've looked at is about getting Jesus. Finding him in his word where he speaks to us. Finding him in prayer as your great heavenly father.

Finding him in his people as he works in them in front of you. Finding him as you confess sin to be faithful to forgive you. And finding him as you witness. And he opens your eyes to more of his goodness.

You position yourself to see more of Jesus and the result will be that your witness is clearer. Is louder. Is more compelling. It's a big job.

To try and witness Jesus to the ends of the earth. But this is incredible. As God hands us this responsibility to glorify him.

[34 : 16] To make more disciples. To draw people into following him. The way he does it. Is intricately connected to the same path that will give you the most joy.

That will give you the best purpose. That will give you the deepest security. That will give you the brightest hope. The journey home is all about God.

All about what he has done. It begins with his work on the cross. It ends with his presence and perfection in heaven. And the key to this bit in the middle. The key to life right now.

Is to encounter as much of Jesus as you possibly can. Just to soak in whatever you can get of who he is.

And what he's done. Start at the cross. Get into his word. Listen to his voice. Pray. Gather with his people. And lastly tonight testify.

[35 : 15] Be a witness. Speak of what you've seen. And heard. And felt. And experienced. And then do it all over again. And again. And again. And again. Until one day.

You hear the most incredible words. From your heavenly father. Well done. Journey finished. Welcome home. Let's pray. Let's pray. Father God.

We want to thank and praise you. That you are a gracious and generous God. We want to thank you. That although we so often look at your gifts. And don't recognize how good you're being. That you persist.

You continue to reveal yourself. And bless us. Father. Help us to see. Who it is. That's giving us. This gift. And this calling. To bear witness to you.

[36 : 16] Help us to remember. That you are the God. Who only gives good gifts. You are the God. Who sent your son for us. You are the God. Who is preparing heaven for us.

Help us to trust you. And to step out boldly. Step out. Even in our inadequacy. Knowing that. You are with us. You are powerful. And in this. You have given us the opportunity.

To get to know you better. To get more joy. As we get more of you. Father. I ask that you would so fill our lives. With your majesty. And power.

And goodness. That we wouldn't be able to help. But bear witness to you. That who we are. And what we say. And everything about us. Would just speak.

Of the incredible God. Who loves. Sinners like us. Father. Father. We beg. That you would use us. To draw this community. To draw our families and friends.

[37 : 12] Who don't yet know you. Into the joy. And hope. And peace. Of this journey. Father. We thank you so much for Jesus. We ask that you would lift our eyes.

Every day. From this one. Until we make it home. To see what you have done. What you're preparing. And how you're working with us. In the here and now. Thank you so much.

Amen.